



MINIDOKA NORTH SIDE

N E W S B R I E F

Newsbrief #2

July 2002

BUREAU OF
RECLAMATION

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Minidoka North Side RMP Proceeds

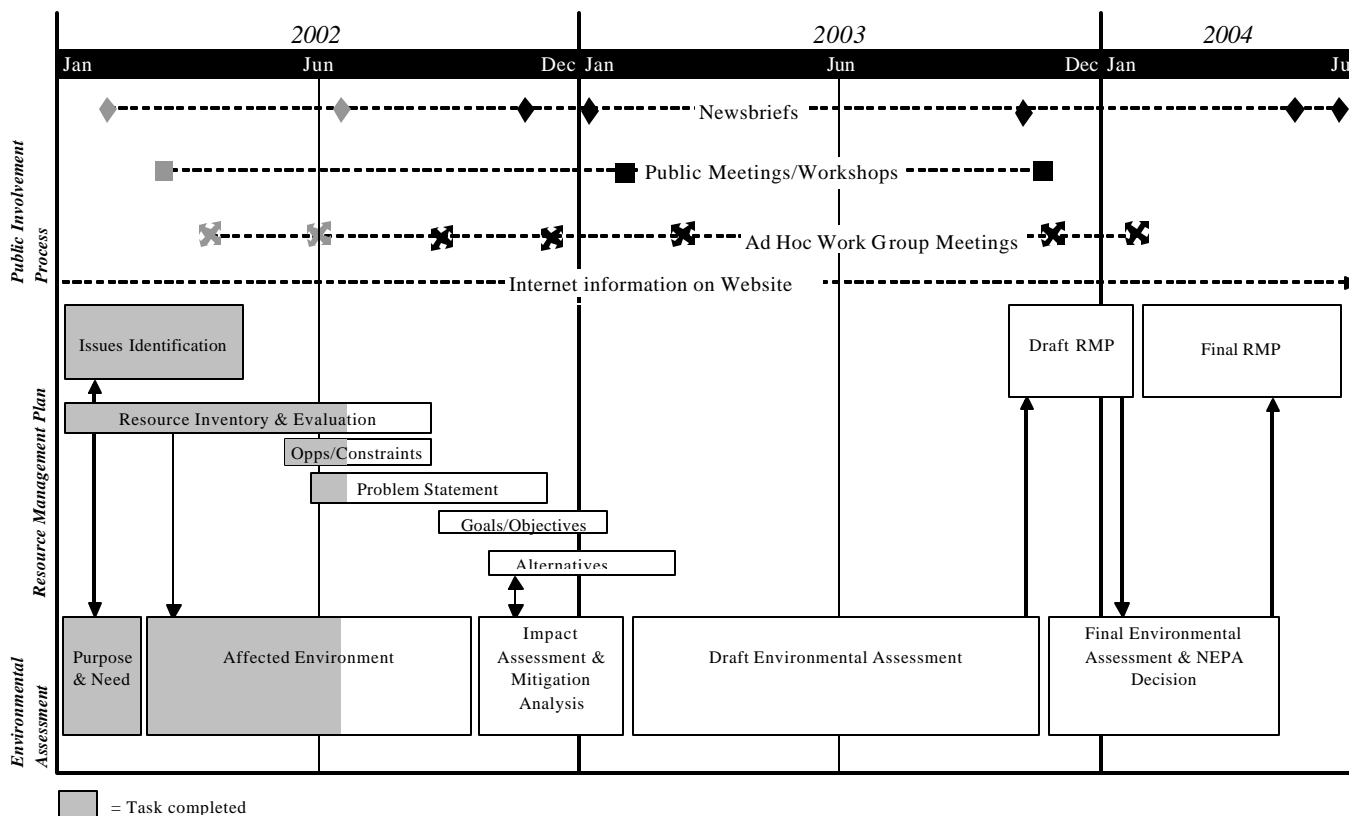
This is the second Newsbrief prepared as part of the Minidoka North Side Resource Management Plan (RMP) process. This issue summarizes the overall planning process, describes public input received to date, introduces the Ad Hoc Work Group created for this project, and summarizes the preliminary resource inventory conducted for the RMP.

The Planning Process

If you are new to our mailing list, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) began a 2-year planning process earlier this year to prepare a Resource Management Plan for the Minidoka North Side area. When completed, the RMP will provide direction for the future use, management, and development of Reclamation lands in the Minidoka North Side study area. The RMP will help Reclamation balance the needs and interests of the public, while also protecting important natural and cultural resources such as wildlife habitat and archaeological sites.

The RMP will also include direction to resolve various issues, such as increasing use on Reclamation lands, coordinating with other agencies with interests in the area, and responsibilities for implementing the RMP. The RMP will be Reclamation's blueprint for the future use, management, and site development of Reclamation's Project lands over the next ten years. As part of the process, Reclamation is also preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) document to analyze potential environmental impacts associated with plan implementation.

Schedule and Workplan



Opportunities for Public Involvement

To develop an effective and realistic management tool, Reclamation is incorporating input from a broad spectrum of public interests. Newsbriefs (like this one), public meetings/workshops, and an Ad Hoc Work Group are the main methods to provide the public with technical information on natural resources and human uses/activities in the Minidoka North Side study area. They also provide avenues for you to voice your concerns and opinions on important issues to address during the planning process. The Ad Hoc Work Group is an important avenue for public input and representation. The recently formed group is composed of agency and interest group representatives and citizens covering an array of public interests and concerns. More information about this Work Group is provided on page 4 of this Newsbrief.

Updated information is
also posted on Reclamation's
world wide web site on the
internet, at
www.pn.usbr.gov

Newsbrief No. 1 was mailed in February 2002, followed by the first public meeting/workshop held in Burley, Idaho on March 6, 2002. Four more Newsbriefs will follow this one (No. 2), keeping you informed of progress on the RMP.

Two more public meetings/workshops will also be held to obtain input on management alternatives and to gather comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment. The Ad Hoc Work Group will meet regularly with the Planning Team over the course of the planning process.

The schedule on the cover illustrates the overall 2½-year planning process and identifies the milestones for public involvement. The Draft EA will be available for public review in the fall of 2003. The Final RMP is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2004.

Public Information Received to Date

Newsbrief No. 1 and the first public meeting/workshop were opportunities for the public to provide initial input on the development of the RMP. As Reclamation had just begun the planning process for the RMP, these early public involvement opportunities were important in defining the plan's focus and direction. Newsbrief No. 1 was sent to more than 450 individuals and included a Mail-in Response Form to gather information on issues and opportunities people see as the most important, and suggestions as to who should be on the Ad Hoc Work Group.



In addition to presenting information on the planning process and management of the Minidoka North

Side study area in general, Reclamation organized the public meeting/workshop to invite public input. Individuals who attended were invited to fill out a worksheet, which asked similar questions to those presented in the Mail-in Response Form from Newsbrief No. 1. Participants at the meeting also broke into small work groups to discuss issues and opportunities that the RMP should address. The issues were ranked by the small groups, and those receiving the highest scores were combined into a summary list of priority issues. About 20 completed Response Forms were mailed back to Reclamation, and approximately 25 people came to the public meeting.

The list on page 3 summarizes public input from both the Mail-in Response Form and the public meeting/workshop. While this information is not intended to be a formal statistical sampling, it does provide the Planning Team with valuable input regarding important values and activities in the Minidoka North Side study area.

**Public
Information
Received to
Date
(continued)**

This summary table lists issues raised by the majority of the public during this initial step in the planning process. Numerous other issues were noted in fewer numbers at the public meetings or in the Mail-in Response Form.




Although these other issues are not listed here, all issues raised are being addressed by the Planning Team and the Ad Hoc Work Group and will be evaluated as part of the planning effort.

Category	Issue
Overarching Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a view to the “big picture”, i.e., look beyond a tract-by-tract perspective to include area/regional needs & opportunities. • Consider economic development in this area in management decisions. • Availability of water and water rights.
Land Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep lands needed for Project purposes in Reclamation’s jurisdiction. • Define criteria for Project purposes. • Support Irrigation District needs as a first priority. • Dispose of lands not needed for Project purposes. • Give preference to adjoining owners in land sales or exchanges. • Expand agricultural and grazing lease opportunities on Reclamation lands. • Protect Reclamation Zone at Minidoka Dam. • Keep all lands in Reclamation jurisdiction—do not relinquish to Bureau of Land Management (BLM). • Allow exchanges/sales to “square up” farm units.
Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory vegetation and wildlife resources on Reclamation lands. • Identify parcels with high resource value and restrict other uses. • Reduce impacts from off-road vehicle (ORV) use, fire, weeds, dumping, and trespass. • Protect wetlands and sensitive species. • Explore opportunities with farmers for cooperative wildlife habitat/farming. • Coordinate efforts for weed/insect control (e.g., BLM/Reclamation). • Water quality management & protection, including recharge of aquifer.
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more recreation opportunities, such as interpretation/education opportunities for cultural resources and wildlife viewing. • Promote economic benefits through recreation. • Examine expanded use opportunities at the State Park. • Protect public access to the river. • Manage current unauthorized camping, examine potential for allowing/providing camping outside of State Park.
Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent illegal dumping, ORV use, and vandalism on Reclamation lands. • Address trespass and encroachment on Reclamation lands. • Protect public safety. • Need for boundary signage and/or fencing. • Need to control fires – fire management.
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct government-to-government consultation with affected Tribes. • Define relationships with other agencies (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS], Idaho Fish and Game [IDFG], Irrigation Districts, BLM, Counties).
Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comply with Federal laws related to Tribes and cultural resources (e.g., Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act). • Need to protect historic cultural sites (e.g., Oregon Trail). • Need to protect archaeological resources, Indian Trust Assets, etc.

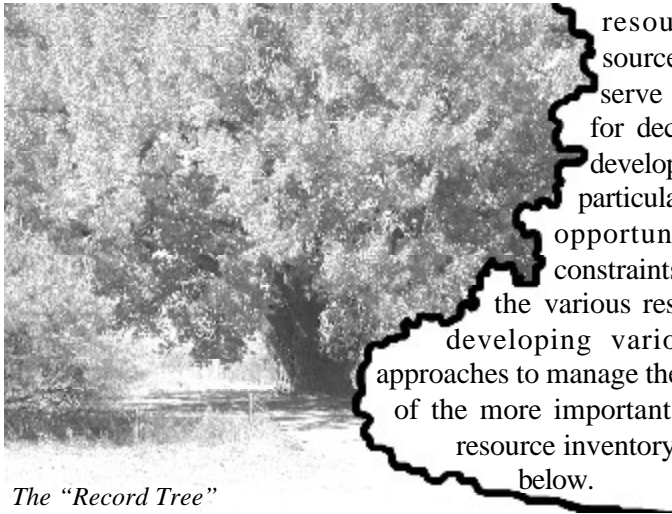
Ad Hoc Work Group

Reclamation has organized an Ad Hoc Work Group to include representatives from key interest groups, citizens, agencies, and Tribes with an interest in the future management and use of the study area. This volunteer group will meet with the Planning Team on a regular basis over the course of the RMP, providing valuable input on the development of goals and objectives, plan options, alternative management plans, and the final proposed plan. This group is also intended to act as your representatives, voicing any specific concerns you may have.

To date, the Work Group has held its first two meetings to become familiar with other members of the Work Group, the planning process, the area's natural resources, and the uses/activities occurring on study area lands. The second meeting also included a field visit to several of the parcels to become more familiar with many of the issues. The Work Group has presented their issues of concern and was briefed on the findings from all of the public input on issues, opportunities, and preferred activities. Members of the Ad Hoc Work Group are listed below.

♦ Billy Thompson Minidoka Irrigation District 98 West 50 South Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-3188	♦ Bob Caywood Pheasants Forever 2010 I Street Heyburn, ID 83336 (208) 677-3100	♦ Cary Bristol Cassia County Sheriff's Office 129 East 14th Burley, ID 83318 (208) 878-1002
♦ Dan Temple A&B Irrigation District P.O. Box 675 Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-3152	♦ Dan Kindig Minidoka County Sheriff's Office P.O. Box 368 Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 434-2380	
♦ Dave Pinther-Local Bus. (Rupert Trading Post) 283 North 100 West Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-0298	♦ Dennis Crane Cassia County Commission 360 South 150 East Burley, ID 83318 (208) 878-7302/670-3640 (c)	♦ Don Handy Minidoka County Commission 400 W 100 S Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 438-5550
♦ Gary Schorzman Minidoka County Historical Society 148 West 300 North Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-3982	♦ Guy Dodson Sr. Shoshone-Paiute Tribes-Habitat, Parks, Fish & Game P.O. Box 219 Owyhee, NV 89832 (208) 759-3246	♦ Hunter Osborne Shoshone-Bannock Tribes P.O. Box 306 Fort Hall, ID 83203 (208) 478-3761
	♦ Jerry Ball – Adj. Prop. Owner Pheasants Forever 676 North 910 Lane East Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 531-4020	♦ Lloyd Richins Adjacent Property Owner 314 South Crestview Road Paul, ID 83347 (208) 438-5580
♦ Mark Fleming Idaho Department of Fish & Game – Region 4 868 East Main Jerome, ID 83338 (208) 324-4359	♦ Reid Smith Minidoka County Weed Control 120 South 400 West Paul, ID 83347 (208) 438-8195	♦ Robert Christensen City of Rupert 609 19th Street Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-6515
♦ Scott Barker Bureau of Land Management 15 East 200 South Burley, ID 83318 (208) 677-6678		♦ Steve Bouffard U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Minidoka Wildlife Refuge 961 East Minidoka Dam Road Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-3589
♦ Steve Schuyler Natural Resource Conservation Service 98 B South 200 West Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-4777 x33	♦ Trapper Richardson Idaho State Parks and Recreation Walcott State Park 959 East Minidoka Dam Road Rupert, ID 83350 (208) 436-1258	♦ Veronica Lierman Jerome County Commission 300 North Lincoln Jerome, ID 83338 (208) 324-8811

Resource Inventory



The "Record Tree"

One of the initial technical tasks of the RMP is to compile a complete and up-to-date inventory of the resources associated with the study area, including recreation, land use, cultural, and natural resources. The resource inventory will serve as a foundation for decision-making in developing the plan, in particular by identifying opportunities and constraints associated with the various resources and then developing various alternative approaches to manage the parcels. Some of the more important findings of the resource inventory are summarized below.

Physical Resources

- The focus of the soils evaluation has been on whether soil types limit resource possibilities, such as wetland development.
- Most soils in the area are windblown into the area, then formed underneath the sagebrush-grass community.
- The main concern for the hydrology, surface water, groundwater, and water quality resource areas is the reinjection of drain water into the Snake River Plain aquifer, which is a designated sole-source for drinking water.
- Studies by the Idaho Department of Water Resources have shown that the key contaminants in the aquifer are sediment, turbidity, and coliform levels.
- Reclamation and the irrigation districts are looking for ways to improve water quality.

Natural Resources

- Vegetation on the parcels ranges from cheatgrass to fairly intact native shrub-steppe communities.
- Larger parcels, farther from roads and disturbance, have better vegetation and wildlife resources, especially farther inside the parcel.

- Grazing occurred on many parcels historically; much of this has been eliminated during the past few years, and Reclamation biologists in some cases have observed the return of some native bunchgrasses.
- A few playas are present where water stays in low areas long enough to prevent establishment of upland vegetation, but not enough to encourage riparian vegetation, creating the appearance of mudflats and supporting unique vegetation.
- Weeds are an issue throughout the area, especially near water.
- Pheasant populations have declined dramatically throughout southern Idaho, primarily due to a lack of nesting habitat.

Recreation Resources

- The primary recreation opportunities in the area include Lake Walcott State Park, Snake River, and the Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge.
- According to a recent survey of Lake Walcott State Park users, people are generally pleased with their experience; problems noted included disturbances and disruptive behavior by others.
- Outside the State Park, primary recreation activities on the North Side parcels are hunting and fishing. There is also a high occurrence of other recreation, primarily shooting (target practice).
- Access is more than abundant into the parcels. In fact, one of the management problems may be that there is too much access. ORV use is occurring on many parcels, which is an illegal activity on Reclamation lands.



Riparian habitat along the Snake River

Resource Inventory (continued)



Day use facilities at Lake Wolcott State Park

Land Management and Use

- As part of the RMP effort, Reclamation is examining 120 individual land parcels, covering approximately 16,000 acres.
- Most of these parcels are in shrub-steppe habitat and not currently used for agriculture; the next largest category is an agricultural cover type.
- Other than Reclamation, land managers include the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (managing Lake Walcott State Park), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (managing lands within the Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge).
- There are 11 active leases on Reclamation parcels primarily for agriculture and some grazing. There is also a lease for the City of Rupert for wastewater disposal, as well as an apiary permit.
- Dumping is prevalent on many of the parcels.
- There are numerous encroachments on the parcels, mainly from adjacent agricultural lands.

Cultural Resources

- Cultural resources potentially present in the study area include historic and prehistoric sites, paleontological resources, and traditional cultural properties. The possible presence of Indian sacred sites and Indian Trust Assets is also reviewed as part of the planning process.
- Reclamation is working with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes to address their concerns.
- A preliminary inventory has identified more than 100 sites, most of which are historic; approximately 25 of these sites may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.



Dumping is an issue in some parcels

Next Steps

After the Planning Team completes the resource inventory, they will begin evaluating the varying levels at which the resources might accommodate different kinds of uses, levels of development, protection and conservation measures, and management programs and policies. Newsbrief No. 3, scheduled for early fall, will provide an update on Reclamation's progress on these portions of the planning process.



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